

Uniting People and Science for Conservation

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Since 1978, the Vermont Loon Recovery Project (VLRP) has been working with citizens, lakeshore owners, hydro dam operators, lake associations, state agencies, and other conservation groups to secure the future of Vermont loons. **Over 50% of Vermont's loons nest in higher risk locations prone to disturbance or flooding. The VLRP's strategic integration of monitoring, management, and public education has spurred solid gains in the number of breeding pairs and chicks that fledge.**

Volunteer

There are many different types of volunteer opportunities available from surveying a lake on a single day to helping all summer long.

To volunteer or report loon sightings (especially on lakes without established pairs), email: ehanson@vtecostudies.org



Contribute

VLRP is funded in part by Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department, but most of our funding comes from concerned citizens who would like to help the Common Loon in Vermont.

If you would like to contribute, please send a check to the address below, or make an online donation at www.vtecostudies.org.

Vermont Center for Ecostudies
PO Box 420, Norwich, VT 05055

VCE is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. All gifts are tax deductible.

www.vtecostudies.org/loons

April: **Loons return soon after "ice-out" to establish their territories.** Small ponds and lakes of less than 200 acres typically have only one loon pair, while larger lakes may have several. **Non-breeding intruder loons may target a territory for a "takeover" attempt, which contributes to changes in 20% of mated pairs each year.**

May — June: Loons build their nests in a sheltered area very close to **the water's edge, often in a marsh or on a small island or manmade "nesting raft". Nests surrounded by water are much safer from predators such as raccoons.** The female lays 1 or 2 eggs that will be incubated by both parents over 27-28 days. On average, loons do not nest until they are 6 years old.

June — August: Chicks can swim within hours of hatching out. The parents move the family to nursery areas with less wind and wave action. Parent loons are highly protective during this time. Males may **"yodel" at intruder loons or boaters who come too close. If intruder loons are present, chicks are usually "stashed" near shore.**

September — November: The chicks become much more independent during this time. They learn to feed themselves and practice flying for the upcoming migration. A loon's average dive length is 35-40 seconds.

November — April: Vermont loons migrate to ocean wintering grounds mainly off the New England coast. Upper Midwest loons head to the Carolinas south to the Gulf of Mexico. Adults undergo a feather molt in the fall and look similar to a full grown chick or 1-2 year old subadult (gray/white).



Brochure funded by:



A guide for boaters

Vermont's Common Loon



Connecting people to our lakes and ponds

www.vtecostudies.org/loons

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Loon Vocabulary

Happy Loons
observe from a distance



wing flap—preening



Relaxed position on water



feeding

Distressed Loons
slowly move away



wing rowing



penguin dance



hiding on nest



alert/raised bill or furrowed brow—tremolo (loon laugh)



yodeling



hiding on water

Loons can be curious and may approach you.

Enjoy the moment but keep your movements slow.

And try to keep a distance of 100 yards (football field), especially if there are chicks present.

The mournful “wail”...ooohh ahhh.....Loons identifying or calling each other; initial sign of mild disturbance.

The laughing “tremolo”...a trill of series of trills A sign of distress or alarm.

The crazy and wild “yodel”.....The male territorial call. This call is usually directed at unwelcome loons.

Hoots and coos.....on a quiet evening, you can hear the loon family talking to each other.

Images from J. McIntyre. 1988. “Common Loon: Spirit of Northern Lakes.”

Common Loon—Fascinating Facts

- ◆ **Common Loons are migratory birds that nest on many of Vermont’s lakes and ponds.** They are known for their striking black and white plumage, red eyes, and haunting calls.
- ◆ Loons can weigh from 8 to 14 pounds. Their solid bones and powerful legs make them excellent divers for fish and invertebrates, **but loons need a 100 to 600 ft. “runway” to take off.** Once in the air, they can reach flying speeds of 40 to 75 mph.
- ◆ With their legs situated far back on the body, loons are extremely clumsy on land, coming ashore only to nest.
- ◆ There are 4 other species of loons, including Red-throated, Pacific, Arctic, and Yellow-billed Loons. These species breed in the arctic and northern boreal regions.
- ◆ Loons from Minnesota to **Manitoba may weigh only 2/3’s of Vermont loons,** likely because of their longer migration distances.
- ◆ Most loon chicks return to within 30 miles of their natal lake without the guidance of their parents, after spending 2-3 years on the ocean as sub-adults.



Loons build their nests close to the water’s edge.

Conservation Notes

Thanks to the help of lakeshore owners, awareness by boaters, and volunteers, loons have returned to Vermont after dipping to less than 10 nesting pairs in the 1980s.

Nesting rafts have been used successfully on waterbodies that fluctuate and where most shorelines have been developed.

Nest warning signs have given loons some critical quiet space during a time when they are most vulnerable to disturbance.



Share the Water



Respect: Enjoy loons from a distance through binoculars. When paddling a kayak or canoe, never pursue loons for a photo or a close look. A loon constantly swimming away from you is a stressed loon.

Avoid Nesting Areas: Not all nest sites are signed. Be aware of potential nests in marshes and on islands and be ready to keep paddling slowly away from a loon sitting on shore. If a loon leaves the nest, depart the area immediately, and the loon will return once it feels safe.

Slow Down: Loon chicks are difficult to see. If boating at high speeds, note where the loon family is and avoid that area. **Please observe the “no wake speed” law within 200 feet of shorelines.** Wakes from boats can flood shoreline nests dislodging eggs, and speeding boats have been known to run over loons, injuring or killing them.

Get the Lead Out: Fish responsibly. Loons, like many birds, ingest small pebbles in order to help digest their food. Unfortunately, if the material they collect contains lead from sinkers or jigs, poisoning of the loon and death may occur.



Reel In When Loons Diving Nearby: Loons will take live bait and lures. About 50% of loon deaths are caused by ingestion of lead fishing gear and line.



Ingested fishing hook and wad of line

Take Action: It is against the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act to harass migratory birds in the US. Please report loon harassment to your local game warden or state police.

Plant a blueberry bush: If you own shoreline, let your lawn grow wild to create wildlife habitat. Promote woody debris and underwater plants for aquatic insects, fish, and the loons. If you need a mowed area, keep it small and away from shore.

Enjoy: **Vermont’s lakes and ponds can be home to both people and animals,** if we treat each other with respect and are good stewards of forested shorelines and underwater habitat.